

Departure

by

Alan Wake

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Episode 1: NIGHTMARE

^[01] The man turned to face me. His face was covered in shadows. It was hard to make him out in the darkness of the forest that surrounded us, but the axe he lifted was plain to see. It glistened with the blood of his victim.

He grinned madly. The shadows were alive, distorting his features.

It was a scene from a nightmare, but I was awake.

^[02] The taken stood before me. It was impossible to focus on it, as if it stood in a blind spot caused by a brain tumor or an eye disease. It was bleeding shadows like ink underwater, like a cloud of blood from a shark bite.

I was terrified. I squeezed the flashlight like my life depended on it, willing it to stop it coming any closer. Suddenly, something gave, and the light seemed to shine brighter.

^[03] For a long time, the Dark Presence had been weak, sleeping, nothing but a half-forgotten nightmare or a shadowy flicker in the corner of an eye in the forest at night; not real enough to properly exist, and yet too evocative to fade away completely.

Now it was waking up, the writer like a fly caught in a spider's web, each jerk and kick vibrating the strands that led deep into its lair. It was aware of him now, and it could use him.

All he'd need was a little incentive.

^[04] I heard them before I saw them, swooping down from the sky and screeching as they came.

I spun around just as the cloud was upon me. For an instant, I stared into a hundred dead eyes, black pearls glittering in the darkness.

I raised the flashlight and the swarm exploded like fireworks. Feathers burned, turned into ash. I couldn't hear my scream above theirs.

^[05] At first, I kept finding the pages as if by accident. The book I couldn't remember was either a terrible and true prophecy, or an act of creation that had rewritten the world. I began to hunt the pages, feverishly, for they held the answer to the mystery.

With it I could save myself.

With it I could save Alice.

^[06] I stepped into the gas station's garage. It was dark and quiet. The place was a mess. It looked like someone trashed the place, or that there'd been some kind of fight. Light spilled into the room through an open door at the back, and I made my way toward it.

Without any warning, I was blinded by a bright light. An old portable TV on the shelf had come alive by itself. Impossibly, I could see myself on the screen, talking like a madman.

^[07] "*The cabin on Cauldron Lake?*" she asked.

The Sheriff looked at me suspiciously. The early morning light flooded through the office windows. I would probably never have gotten out of the woods alive without her help, but I couldn't tell her the truth of what I'd faced the previous night. She'd think I was lying, or crazy. She'd lock me up.

And she wouldn't help me find Alice.

^[08] Stucky spat on the garage floor and tried to shake the cobwebs from his head. Ever since the couple never showed to pick up the keys, things had been fuzzy.

Something -- a feeling -- caught his attention. Stucky looked up and stared as his brain tried in vain to process the horror before him. He stumbled back, knocking over a can of oil; a black pool spread across the floor while he struggled for a brief moment, then let go as the unrelenting darkness engulfed him.

^[09] Rose knew she'd been gushing, but right now, she didn't care. As far as she was concerned, her brief meeting with Alan Wake was literally the high point of her life.

She watched as he got in the car with his wife. She was pretty, confident, at ease with Wake, not like Rose. They were perfect for each other.

She'd have given anything to be called their friend.

^[10] Barry Wheeler was bouncing off the walls. He'd jumped on a plane after his calls were ignored by both Al and Alice for several days. It could mean that they were both on a second honeymoon, but Barry didn't buy it. Al had been way too unstable for that -- not sleeping, messed up.

Barry had years of experience dealing with Alan Wake, and he couldn't ignore it; something was wrong.

^[11] Toby knew the smell: it was the man, the nice man who always gave him treats and never got tired of playing with him. Toby wagged his tail in excited anticipation and gave a joyous bark. Then there was another smell - a wrong smell - and it was alien enough to stop Toby in his tracks. Confused, he growled deep in his throat. The wrong smell came from the nice man. Blind animal terror pierced the dog's brain an instant before the axe followed suit.

^[12] Barry took another sip of the heavenly coffee. He grinned at Rose. Surely, this was love.

Rose gushed on, breathlessly: "*The new one will be a masterpiece. I know it! You must tell him not to listen to the trolls in the forums saying "Departure" will never get finished. He should take his time and make it perfect. I can wait.*"

Episode 2: TAKEN

^[01] It's true what they say about the fall and the sudden stop at the end.

I'd lain here in the snow while the lurid chain of scenes that had led me here kept playing in my head, a rerun of my own private snuff movie, a memory of my corpse. Alone at my own wake. Thinking in metaphors again.

The femme fatale was gone. Only a sour taste remained of the kiss that killed me.

^[02] This was a late goodbye. Thirteen years after I'd gotten my revenge, it had finally caught up with me. It'd been a long time to bear the pain.

My blood painted the snow red -- a gruesome slushie -- dissolved all the scattered painkillers, and leisurely dripped down to the sewer, mingling with the bile of the city, becoming one with it.

I can see them now, my wife and my baby. Honey, I'm home.

^[03] In spite of its human mask, to describe the Dark Presence as intelligent would have implied human qualities on something decidedly inhuman.

Nonetheless, it found the one spot in the diner that was dark enough. Some light spilled into the corridor, ravaging it, but it took the pain, horrible as it was. The writer would soon fix that. He would be coming to the one place where it still had power.

^[04] The kidnapper fired his gun one last time, and the shadow vanished into the darkness it had come from.

"See, nothing to it, Wake."

The thought of Alice in his hands was revolting. We stood on the wooden platform of Lovers' Peak, the waterfall and the mountain behind us, the lights of the radio-mast blinking red in the heights above. I fought with the urge to take a swing, forced myself to speak.

"Let's cut the act now. Where's my wife?"

^[05] Alice looked through the viewfinder, lining up the shot. Cauldron Lake was breathtaking. Something caught her eye: a figure standing in the shadows behind the cabin, like a thin woman in a black dress.

She lowered the camera and looked again -- no one there, just a collection of bushes that looked vaguely human-shaped. She shook her head and laughed.

^[06] Barry had never gotten along with Alice, but he knew Alan loved her with an almost frightening intensity. And now something had happened to Alice -- and here was Al, armed with a gun and saying things people got put in padded cells for. It was as if his friend had experienced a massive psychotic episode and was now totally disconnected from reality.

It scared the shit out of Barry.

^[07] The air in the visitor center was heavy with an awful smell, as if some rotten drowned thing had crawled up from its grave.

Rusty kept coughing blood. My eyes were drawn to the twisted shape of his broken leg. The attack had been vicious. Max whined in his cage. Rusty's eyes were wild with fear and terror.

He gasped: "*Mr. Wake, it happened just the way it was on that page.*"

^[108] The Visitor Center was sturdy, but the impact turned the front of the building into splinters. Rusty was thrown across the lobby like a rag doll and hit the far wall hard.

It didn't hurt until he tried to move and saw his leg bend the wrong way, felt the broken rib stabbing him on the inside. Rusty howled in pain and fear, suddenly afraid to die alone.

^[109] At the last instant, I changed direction and threw myself down; the axe splintered the trunk of a tree.

I stumbled into the pool of bright light. My lungs burned; I was too exhausted to move. I tensed as I waited for the killing blow, but it never came. I raised my head. Nothing moved in the darkness beyond.

For the moment, bathed in the cold light, I was safe.

^[110] In that last instant of consciousness, Rusty thought about Rose. He was older than she was; Rose was barely out of her teens. But she made him feel young and forget what a train wreck his long dead marriage had been.

He still wore the ring. He'd been waiting for her to tell him to take it off.

Now she never would.

^[111] I turned the corner, afraid of what the flashlight's beam might reveal. Suddenly, a roughly painted symbol of a torch glowed in the light. Behind it, hidden by a rock, sat a battered metal trunk.

It was here for a reason, packed with supplies: batteries, flares, ammo. Things you need to make it through the darkness of the night. Something left behind by someone who knew what I knew, and more.

^[112] Agent Nightingale didn't want to be in Bright Falls. These little communities revolted him. And he didn't like the trees or the coffee. He now knew that impossible horrors lurked behind the storefronts and smiles.

He desperately wanted to turn the car around and just drive until he passed out or ran out of the road and booze. But he had a job to do. He had a writer to catch.... at any cost.

^[113] On more than one occasion, Alice had tried to explain to me how it felt to be afraid of the dark. To her, darkness wasn't simply the absence of light, but something more tangible than that. It was something you could touch and feel.

Worse than that, it was something with a mind of its own, something malicious and malign. For her, things changed when they were wrapped in darkness, they turned into something else, something foreign, and nothing was safe or innocent anymore.

I'd never really understood what she meant, until now.

^[114] The night had been one desperate situation after another. I was exhausted and my body felt as though it had been chewed up and spat out.

The flashlight was heavy in my hand, and each pull of the trigger sent a painful shock up my arm. But I was finally out of the woods and things were looking up.

That's when I heard the chainsaw.

^[15] When Barry saw the darkness attack the Visitor Center, it made him a believer. The men Al said he'd shot -- they hadn't been just locals on crank.

Somehow, the world had changed. Like the channel had been switched without a warning. You think you're watching a sitcom and you're really watching a horror show.

When the birds started attacking the cabin, Barry wasn't surprised, just terrified.

^[16] The FBI agent's command froze me in place. I considered surrender. It was all falling apart anyway; I could give in, let someone else deal with it.

But it felt all wrong. Call it instinct; his posture, the way he held the gun. He was no friend.

Shots ringing in my ears, I leaped for the hole in the fence and stumbled into the darkness beyond.

^[17] The Dark Presence had touched the girl to lure the writer into a trap. now it was night and he lay helpless, drugged, lit only by the flickering of the TV screen filled with static.

Shadows coalesced in the room as the Dark Presence leaned close to the writer, ready to touch him again: "*Back to work, boy.*"

^[18] Rose knew that Rusty was in love with her, and she liked him, too. She liked him a lot. He'd taught her to dance, and life had certainly taught her the value of a man who was gentle. He treated her well, made her smile, made her feel good.

But Rusty wasn't the prince of her dreams, and that tended to underline the unbearable truth: she was no closer to that Hollywood magic than he was.

^[19] Nobody in Bright Falls seemed to know where Al was, but Rose, the waitress at the diner, had seen him. From what Barry could tell, Al pretty much fell off the face of the Earth when he left the diner.

Rose was just the kind of fan that Al hated, but she really tried to help. She was smart too, knew a lot of what was going on in the town, knew a lot about Al, even knew who Barry was.

Barry liked her. That was no big surprise. When it came to women, Barry and Al rarely saw eye to eye.

^[20] Sarah didn't care about the legal threats Wake's agent had made. She let Wake go without argument because there was something about him, she couldn't quite put her finger on, something that reminded her of her father.

She didn't think Wake would hurt his wife. Then she thought about the way he waded into Hartman, that hair-trigger rage flaring up without warning.

^[21] The logging site was a mess. The modular office had been pushed out of the cliff.

Deputy Thornton climbed up from the wreckage, excited, breathing hard from the exertion. "*Nobody there. It's weird. Don't you think that's weird?*"

Bored, Mulligan let out a mighty snort, "*Hell, it's always weird, Thornton. Just a question of sorting out what kinda weird it is this time around.*"

^[22] Shadows stirred, and the wind picked up as I ran through the forest. I felt the Dark Presence turning its gaze toward me. Then the moonlight was blotted by dark shadows that raced violently across the ground, moving too swiftly to be natural. Darkness gathered between the trees and melted again to reveal the Taken. No natural path had brought them here.

^[23] There was no misunderstanding, Cauldron Lake was where Alice and I had stayed, but there was no cabin and no island. I was missing a week. What had happened to me? What had happened to Alice?

I had to get her back. I couldn't face life without her.

Episode 3: RANSOM

^[01] Mr. Randolph liked Rose, that little smile she had, how she was still sweet when life had tried so hard to make her bitter.

It wasn't any of his business what she did in her trailer, but those strangers -- the writer and his smartass sidekick -- looked like trouble, and they'd been in there for hours, way past her normal bedtime. He reached for the phone and called the Sheriff's station.

^[02] For decades, the darkness that wore Barbara Jagger's skin slept fitfully in the dark place that was its home and prison. It was hungry and in pain. It dreamed of its nights of glory when the poet's writing had called it from the depths and given it a brief, terrible taste of power and freedom. The rock stars had stirred it from the deep sleep the poet had sunk it back to in the end.

When it sensed the writer on the ferry, it opened its eyes.

^[03] Nightingale stared through the broken studio window into the dark woods. He turned around, started to walk out, but Maine grabbed his arm.

"Young man, you almost shot me! You don't shoot off rounds at people like that. What's the matter with you?"

Nightingale shook his arm free, marched out. His cheeks burned with rage and humiliation.

^[04] Sarah trusted her gut, and her gut said agent Nightingale was an asshole. He felt wrong, and it wasn't just the smell of stale booze. It was in the way he flashed his badge, pulled rank, the look in his eyes when he wanted answers.

Where was Alan Wake? What was this about an accident? Where was his wife? And most importantly, why did she let Wake go?

He wouldn't answer her questions. *"Federal business"* was all he'd say.

^[05] The pipe wrenched itself loose from the bridge's steel framework. Wrapped in darkness, it floated in midair, twitching spastically. For a moment, I didn't understand what I was looking at.

The heavy object lurched at me with impossible force. I threw myself out of the way, but just barely.

When I turned my flashlight on it, it shook in a dark rage, before it flew at me again.

^[06] I slammed the door shut right in his smug face. He pleaded for me to open the door. True to form, the asshole actually thought I would obey.

I had no sympathy left. No guilt, either, not for him. I took a moment to savor the scream. I bet I had a smile on my face.

It was all that I had time for.

The Dark Presence was inside the lodge with me.

^[07] The darkness surged towards me, sucking everything loose from the ground into its depths, tugging at my clothes.

I saw the flare the kidnapper had dropped and threw myself towards it just as I felt my feet leave the ground. The darkness embraced me with the force of a tornado. Somehow, I managed to light the flare.

The darkness roared and cast me away. I fell, toward the dark waters of the lake far below.

^[08] Rose didn't know how the strange old lady got in her trailer. And she looked...wrong, somehow.

The woman showed her teeth in an approximation of a smile and traced a finger down Rose's cheek. "*Pretty girl*," she said.

Rose felt as if she was falling asleep, but her knees didn't buckle. The crone spoke in a whisper, her words ice cold and dark in Rose's ear.

^[09] Touched by the Dark Presence, Rose was lost in a dreamland where everything was drawn in black and grey crayons. The old lady had promised her that all her wishes would come true. She would be Alan Wake's muse.

She was smiling so hard it hurt her face. She crushed a bottleful of sleeping pills into the coffee.

Deep down inside, she was screaming in terror.

^[10] Danny had stepped out, but what stumbled back in was something else, something alien, a monster. Walter tried to kill it, first with his fists, then a chair.

It wouldn't die; instead, it kept coming, unaffected by the beating it had taken. After Walter managed to kick it down the cellar stairs, fear took over. He ran, got behind the wheel, gunned the engine. The booze wouldn't make him forget, but he knew he had to try.

^[11] The bulldozer's engine roared to life. Mud and rocks flew as it fought for traction. It crashed the concrete wall and landed heavily in the yard.

If it were an animal, it would've shaken its head after the impact, fixed its eyes on me, and charged. Of course, it had no head, nor eyes. Shadows crawled on its form, twisting it into a monster.

Then it came for me.

^[12] Even after all this time, hearing the Night Springs theme caused a surge of conflicting emotions in me.

It had been my first real writing gig. Barry had known a guy who knew a guy, and suddenly I'd been a semi-regular writer on the show. I'd always been ashamed of the job, felt it was trash. I had wanted to be an artist, a novelist.

I'd been naive back then. It had taken a long time to learn to be proud of the work.

^[13] With Nightingale gone and the night wind blowing in through the broken studio window, Maine stared at Sarah. The Sheriff looked away. Maine's voice shook with barely controlled anger.

"That boy's doing more drinking than thinking. I hope you know what you're doing, Sarah. He's got a sickness in his eyes. You take my word for it: he wants Wake for a reason, and it's not for anything good."

^[14] When Thomas Zane fell for Barbara Jagger, it happened fast. She was young, vibrant and beautiful, full of life. He had never been a very happy man, and without any seeming effort she had changed all that.

Zane felt good for the first time in his life. Everything she did was another piece of a jigsaw puzzle he hadn't even known he'd been missing.

And best of all, she made the words flow, strong and sharp. She was his muse.

^[15] Some of the Taken retained echoes of their former selves, but these were just the nerve twitches of a dead thing. Nothing remained but a shell, covered and filled with darkness.

In most cases these puppets were enough for the purpose of the Dark Presence. But for anything more elaborate, as with the writer, it was different. It needed his mind. And so rather than taking him over completely, it merely touched him.

^[16] I stared through the bars of the jail cell. Barry stood behind me, swaying on his feet, looking as ill as I felt.

Agent Nightingale stood on the other side of the bars with Sheriff Breaker. Nightingale had a stack of manuscript pages in his hand. He seemed unhinged as he gloated:

"Well, I've got you now, Raymond Chandler. It's all here, all the evidence, including conspiracy to murder a federal agent."

^[17] Things were never as simple in real life as in fiction. I had lost count of the times I had wished there'd be a clear reason for my writer's block. Something to fight, something to lash out on.

There wasn't. I was filled with doubt. I was nothing like the hero in my books. Alex Casey had gone through his life with single-minded determination, never wavering from his goal. Even now, I was angry at myself, angry at Alice, angry at Barry. I was fumbling and I had no plan.

^[18] Even behind the closed doors and curtains of his grimy room at the Majestic, the local motel, Nightingale could feel the locals' eyes on him, the unrelenting pressure of their judgment.

He forced it out of his mind. For all he knew they could all be under Wake's spell already. You do what you have to do to get the job done.

He took comfort from the bottle in his hand: *"Please,"* he thought, *"just let me get through this."*

^[19] Mott had checked all of Stucky's rental cabins. There had been no sign of the Wakes. It was dark when he'd found their car parked at the end of the road by Cauldron Lake.

It made no sense. They must have taken a wrong turn, but there was no sign of them, and the car had been there for hours already.

Frustrated, Mott stood on the rotten ruin of the footbridge that had once led to Diver's Isle, before it sank beneath the waves years ago. The boss wouldn't be happy.

^[20] I tried to hold on to Alice, but her form melted away. I was losing control. Dr. Hartman stood in her place. I wanted to hit him, but my arms were jelly.

He smiled. It was a reassuring smile and I hated him for it.

"I had to give you a sedative, don't fight it. You went through another rough period. Right now, it's very important that you stay calm. We don't want you to have another episode. You're a patient at my clinic, have been for a while now."

^[21] For Mott, spying on the writer on the ferry had been a disappointment. His boss had made Wake out to be something special, but Mott hadn't been impressed.

He'd gotten a good, long look of the wife, though, and liked what he saw. Mott had fantasized about goading Wake into a fight, but it hadn't happened. Still, he'd get his chance to see if the writer had anything in him.

He'd been promised as much.

^[22] The hunters were big, thickset men, confident and at home in the woods. They were feeling good, running on beer, ghost stories and camaraderie late into the night.

It did them no good as they were taken by the Dark Presence, sucked deep into a darkness far worse than any ghost story they ever told or heard.

^[23] Doc sat down heavily. He'd examined Barry and Rose. Barry was already recovering. Rose was another story: she was conscious, but she was barely present, almost delirious, disturbed, "*touched in the head*," they used to say.

It wasn't the first time Doc had seen someone in such a state, but it'd been over thirty years.

Doc poured himself a stiff drink.

He hadn't forgotten a thing.

^[24] I lifted the page in front of my eyes and read it. In it, I lifted the page in front of my eyes and read it. In it, I lifted the page in front of my eyes and read it. In it, I lifted the page in front of my eyes and read it. In it, I lifted the page in front of my eyes and read it. In it, I lifted the page in front of my eyes and read it.

^[25] Lightning flashed behind the windows of Cauldron Lake Lodge. Tor Anderson laughed and held the steel hammer above his head. Nurse Sinclair was trying to calm him down without success.

Tor grinned madly and shouted: "*My hammer's up! Here's a friendly poke from Mjöllnir, wench!*"

He brought the hammer down with all his might on Sinclair's head.

"*We're on a comeback tour, baby!*"

Episode 4: THE TRUTH

^[01] Zane could feel the poems, taking form, shaping things. As he experimented, he imagined he could almost feel the power surging through the keys of the typewriter.

It exhilarated him, but there was fear, too. If not for his young assistant, Emil, he would have given it up.

But Emil convinced him otherwise. He, too, had a way with words.

^[02] Hartman kept talking, giving Barry the grand tour, clearly proud of the place. He went on and on about his hunting trophies, and Barry was impressed, but he was here on business. He raised his voice, cut through the monologue.

"Hey, Hartman? Where's Al?"

Hartman stopped in the mid-sentence, annoyed at the interruption. He nodded at the hulking orderly standing nearby. The man smiled and clapped a practiced hand on Barry's shoulder.

^[03] Hartman followed the fall of Alan Wake with his binoculars. When the writer hit the water, he ordered Jack to take the boat to him.

The spot was easy to see in the dark even with all the extra lights in the boat. The flare floated and kept burning even in the water.

Jack turned the radio louder as the engine sputtered. The music was rough and clanking, something the Anderson brothers would no doubt have enjoyed, but Hartman chose to ignore it. Wake was finally within his reach.

^[04] Hartman knew he was no creator. He had no ambitions on that front, and he certainly didn't want to end up like every artist he had worked with here: damaged in ways that were hard to describe, or worse.

It was enough for Hartman to maintain creative control and provide direction. To be a "producer." That was what most of these people were in need of, anyway.

Of course, suitable subjects were few and far between.

^[05] I stared at the Viking paraphernalia that littered the area, surrounding an unlikely centerpiece: a full-sized stage, complete with all the trimmings, including a dragon. It took a special kind of crazy to build something like this in a remote field.

When the sky split open with a deafening boom and the music started blasting, it felt strangely appropriate.

"Al, be careful! I can see them moving around! They're coming for you!"

^[06] For the moment, Barry was just glad he had survived the fall. He had been separated from Al, and there was no easy way to climb back up.

He told himself he'd be okay, okay in the gloomy forest at night. He would just have to wait a while for Al to find his way down. Barry turned when he heard the heavy footsteps and saw the movement: the man-shaped shadow lunged at him from the bushes, an axe held high.

Barry screamed and threw up his hand. The world exploded.

^[07] Mott knew that Wake was smarter than him; Wake had more money, a beautiful wife, everything. And Hartman said Wake was important. That made him better than Mott. But Mott was calling the shots now. He'd expected Wake to whimper and grovel, but instead, he seemed willing to fight. Mott knew he'd gotten under Wake's skin.

If only Mott actually had his wife. The thought made him shiver.

^[08] Hartman wasn't happy. Mott could see it in his eyes. He quickly lowered his own: he'd made a mess of it, and he knew it.

The shame of failure was hard to bear. He hadn't expected Wake to say he needed more time, and he'd blurted out "*two days*," less than Wake had asked for, to show him who was in charge.

But that wasn't part of Hartman's plan.

^[09] Hartman hurried down the corridor. He had disliked leaving Wake when he was surely at his most susceptible to therapy, but this was not an ordinary storm. Wake had been writing, and he had woken something up in the depths of the lake. Now it was coming for him.

Hartman had naturally prepared for a situation like this. The idiot brothers would keep Wake distracted while Hartman double-checked everything, just to be sure.

^[10] Hartman watched as Wake's features slackened. The man was bull-headed, no doubt; even lying on the bed, he's almost broken Hartman's nose the second time. But with a little time, he could break Wake down, give him proper direction. Wake was easily the most promising subject he'd had...well, since Tom, really.

"*Sleep well, Alan*," Hartman whispered with a smile. "*Let me take care of you*."

He sniffed hard to clear his throbbing nose; swallowed blood and barely tasted it.

^[11] Agent Nightingale stared at the passed-out writer. The man was sleeping off one hell of a night. Nightingale felt a stab of envy at Wake's oblivion. But he had a job to do.

He put the gun to Wake's head, and almost became a murderer.

His hand shook and his throat felt tight and dry. Biting his teeth, he tried again to pull the trigger. He lost the nerve.

Wake stirred. Nightingale would have to settle for an arrest.

^[12] The storm raged on as the Anderson brothers walked unsteadily away from the clinic with the other patients in tow, knowing that this time they wouldn't return. The darkness around them seethed with horrors, but Tor and Odin were unafraid.

Their eyes glinted with guile. They knew every secret path, and there was blood on their hands.

They had fought these shades before.

^[13] The Dark Presence followed the choreography laid out to it in the manuscript, growing stronger and stronger, moving like a storm from one scene of destruction to the next.

But it was still bound to follow the story and chained to the dark place it came from.

When the story reached the end, it longed for, it would finally be free.

^[14] It's 1976. Madness reigns at the Anderson farm. Contrary to all logic, the headiest ingredient of their moonshine is unfiltered water from Cauldron Lake.

The Andersons felt like gods.

Odin can't stop laughing. He contemplates cutting his eye out.

Tor runs across the field, naked, shrieking, hammer in his hand, trying to catch lightning.

Their songs have power, something ancient is stirring in the depths, coming back.

^[15] Again, Alice's screams rang in the stillness of the night. I saw myself run toward the cabin, flashlight in my hand.

I followed my past self. I was an out-of-body observer, a time traveler in a crazy, drunken dream. This was the beginning, the night Alice had disappeared.

The mystery of what had happened during the missing week was about to reveal itself.

^[16] When he stopped the car at the Anderson farm, Walter felt relieved; oblivion was close at hand. The brothers wouldn't miss a jar of moonshine, or two, in the booby hatch.

But then he saw the man on the porch, and he knew who it was.

Driving for his life and knowing it was useless, he didn't realize he was crying until he couldn't see the road for the tears.

^[17] Hartman had never felt as anxious as during the week after Mott had managed to lose the Wakes. Their car stood by the path that had once led to Diver's Isle. Hartman thought about Thomas Zane's cabin in the depths.

It was only a matter of time before Wake started writing. They had to be found, and fast.

The moment he heard on the police radio that Sheriff Breaker had picked up Wake, he was already in his car, driving toward town.

^[18] For a moment, Hartman considered strangling the idiot. Mott was mean-spirited, but easily manipulated; an emotional infant who lived for his approval.

Wake, by contrast, was a far more difficult subject. Mott had given him too much leash. In two days, who knew what could happen? Hartman would have to find a way to rein him in, and quickly.

^[19] Deputy Mulligan tuned Thornton's chatter out. He didn't think writers were particularly useful people, and a huge manhunt for one struck him as idiotic, certainly not worth the missed opportunity for coffee and pie. It wasn't even clear what the man had done, except run from them at the trailer park.

Mulligan knew he wasn't alone: the sheriff's patience with the Fed was running out.

^[20] As the deputies hauled Wake and Wheeler away, Agent Nightingale eagerly examined the stack of papers Wake had been carrying. It was incomplete, a collection of random pages.

But there was enough: he saw his own name in there, among others. His hands shook with emotion.

Finally, it was proof. He had been right all along.

Episode 5: THE CLICKER

^[01] Nightingale tried to make sense of the manuscript. It was disjointed and strange. He didn't understand half of it, but it all rang true, impossibly true.

He took out his hip flask when he reached the page that described how he reached the page that made him take out his hip flask.

It wasn't the booze that made his mind reel.

^[02] Nightingale felt the situation veering out of his control, but the gun at least felt steady in his hands. He was ready to fire, resolved that he would let this happen over his dead body--and yet he hesitated.

He had seen this moment before, read it in the page. He was transfixed by the déjà vu and the horror that he was a character in a story someone had written.

Then the monstrous presence burst in behind him and dragged him into the night.

^[03] The darkness that wore Barbara Jagger's face was furious. The story in the manuscript had been making it stronger all the time, but now the light had set the writer free and hurt it, weakened it.

It was only a matter of days before the Dark Presence would be strong again, but meanwhile, it would be difficult to recapture the writer.

^[04] Cynthia Weaver worked hard, following her obsessive rituals--sometimes fighting them, always giving into them in the end.

She haunted the halls of Bright Falls' abandoned power plant. She marked her caches with light-sensitive paint that could only be seen by eyes that had been touched by darkness and saved by light like she'd been.

She was preparing defenses and supply lines for the war she knew would come--the war between the forces of light and darkness.

^[05] For it to be free, the Dark Presence needed the writer to finish the story. Again and again the story let it get frustratingly close to the writer without letting it capture him. It was bound by the events depicted in the manuscript.

But it could pursue the writer indirectly, put others on the task, and stop those who would help him.

It took over everything in its path, made them its puppets, and sent them after Alan Wake.

^[06] Alice had screamed until she had no voice left to scream. Around her, the darkness was alive. It was cold and wet and malevolent and without end. She was a prisoner, trapped in the dark place.

The terror would have burned her mind out, but one thing made her hang on: she could sense Alan in the dark. She could hear him. She could see the words he was writing as flickering shadows.

He sensed her, too. He was trying to work his way to her.

^[07] Barry was in his element, making calls, making things happen, even if he didn't entirely know what those things were. He wouldn't let the hot sheriff chick down, even if every noise he heard from outside--and he heard plenty--made him jump. He had only paused to text Al a message, told him to hurry up.

Suddenly, Barry froze in mid-dial: a window broke somewhere in the building, and then the lights went out.

^[08] Barry got back to his feet inside the Bright Falls General Store and dusted himself off. Right next to the cans of baked beans was a locked case filled with flare guns. And yet, here was a conveniently placed barrel of crowbars!

Barry's smile widened as he realized that this was the classic movie scene where the hero had to gear up and arm himself to the teeth. Barry threw himself into the role.

^[09] The story I had written in the cabin had come true. Touched by the Dark Presence, I had written a horror story, but the end was still missing. The story was incomplete, and the last unfinished page of the manuscript still sat in the typewriter in the cabin study.

If I could get back there, if I could read the page, then I could write my own ending to the story and save Alice.

^[10] Sarah was almost starting to relax. Maybe they could turn this into a win yet.

Suddenly, there was a piercing sound, like a table saw gone wild, as a hundred birds made out of shadows swarmed into the rotor.

The chopper bucked wildly, and the board lit up, telling her what she already knew: they were going down. Barry Wheeler screamed next to her.

^[11] Thomas Zane knew he had to remove all that had made this horror possible, including himself. That was the only way to banish the dark presence he had unleashed and now looked at him through the eyes of his dead love.

But he also knew that despite his best efforts, it might someday return, so even as he wrote himself and his work out of existence, he added a loophole as insurance, an exception to the rule: anything of his stored in a shoebox would remain.

^[12] Making her way through the water pipe alone, Cynthia was angry at the writer. Foolish young man, taking unnecessary risks. And the way he broke the rules! Didn't he understand what was at stake?

Since the terrible days in the 70s, she hadn't wavered once, as hard as it had been. She was tired of protecting the town all these long years and now only wanted to rest.

^[13] The Poet and the Muse lyrics by Old Gods of Asgard.

The chorus:

*And now to see your love set free
You will need the witch's cabin key
Find the lady of the light, gone mad with the night
Find the lady of the light, still racing in the night
That's how you reshape destiny*

^[14] Children of the Elder God lyrics by Old Gods of Asgard.

The first verse and chorus:

*Warriors, torchbearers, come redeem our dreams
Shine a light upon this night of otherworldly fiends
Odin's might be your guide, divorce you from the sane
Hammer's way will have its say, rise up in their name
Oh, Memory and Thought
Jet black and clawed
Children of the Elder God
Scourge of light upon the dark*

^[15] Children of the Elder God lyrics by Old Gods of Asgard.

The second verse and chorus:

*Scratching hag, you can rake your claws, and gnash your crooked teeth
You've taken slaves, like ocean waves, now feel the ocean seethe
Father Thor, bless this war between the dark and light
In their songs let their wrongs bring dissolution's night
Oh, Memory and Thought
Jet black and clawed
Children of the Elder God
Scourge of light upon the dark*

Episode 6: DEPARTURE

^[01] The Dark Presence was no longer trying to capture the writer so he could create the ending it wanted.

The writer knew too much. He was too strong, and he carried a weapon left behind by Thomas Zane, something that could hurt it.

Now the darkness was doing everything in its power to simply stop the writer from ever reaching Cauldron Lake and the dark place it came from.

^[02] The bottom of Cauldron Lake was a graveyard of things the lake had claimed in one way or another over the decades. The Dark Presence brought them up in its wake, scattering the rotten, waterlogged hull of an old boat here, the remains of a long-ago crashed airplane there.

Trees shattered under the impacts. The earth groaned. It didn't even notice.

^[03] Zane cut its heart out, but it didn't die. The thing that wore Barbara's face kept crooning sweet nothings, sugar laced with poison.

He put on the suit, untied the monster from the chair. The thing in his arms thrashed weakly, but he held fast. He stepped outside, off the pier, and into the dark water, a sinking pinprick of light, descending toward a bottom that never came.

^[04] The dark place I found myself in was unlike anything I could ever have imagined; it wasn't solid, it flowed. The was conceptual and subjective.

For someone else, an artist in another field, it would have been very different. I could sense the story of the manuscript all around me, the words and ideas floating in the air, poised to become real.

^[05] After Zane had gone, I stood alone in the shifting dream that was the dark place. I had to find a way to the cabin. I had written myself a way through this place in the manuscript.

I followed the idea of a path. I had written myself across the ocean that blocked my way, and with that, there was a bridge to the island beyond. The idea of the cabin flickered in the underwater darkness. I willed the cabin to be real.

And it was.

^[06] The Poet and the Muse lyrics by Old Gods of Asgard.

The first verse:

*There's an old tale wrought with the mystery of Tom the Poet and his muse
And a magic lake which gave a life to the words the poet used
Now, the muse she was his happiness, and he rhymed about her grace
And told her stories of treasures deep beneath the blackened waves
'Til in the stillness of one dawn, still in its misty crown
The muse she went down to the lake, and in the waves she drowned*

^[07] The Poet and the Muse lyrics by Old Gods of Asgard.

The second verse:

*The poet came down to the lake to call out to his dear
When there was no answer, he was overcome with fear
He searched in vain for his treasure lost and too soon the night would fall
Only his own echo would wail back at his call
And when he swore to bring back his love by stories he'd create
Nightmares shifted in their sleep in the darkness of the lake.*

^[08] The Poet and the Muse lyrics by Old Gods of Asgard.

The third verse:

*In the dead of night she came to him with darkness in her eyes
Wearing a mourning gown, sweet words as her disguise
He took her in without a word for he saw his grave mistake
And vowed them both to silence deep beneath the lake
Now, if it's real or just a dream one mystery remains
For it is said, on moonless nights they may still haunt this place*

^[09] In the end, Barry wasn't going to shoot Sarah, they both knew that. Once she had no chance of catching up to Wake, Barry gave up the gun and sat down on the floor, shielding his face from the merciless glare of the Well-Lit Room.

"I don't think I'm ever gonna see him again," he said in a weak voice.

Sarah didn't have it in her to be mad at him. Besides, he was probably right.

^[10] I'd first heard the poem in a dream, recited by a strange UFO-like light. I'd read it again in the cabin, in a book by Thomas Zane:

For he did not know

That beyond the lake

He called home

Lies a deeper, darker

Ocean green

Where waves are

Both wilder

And more serene

To its ports I've been

To its ports I've been.